

the

scop



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Scop (skop) OE Scop or sceop
<OHG scoph, scof
(poetry, fiction, sport, jest)
An Old English poet or minstrel

In northern Europe (in Germanic or Teutonic territories), a type of performer—the scop—flourished from the fifth to the seventh or eighth centuries. The first use of this word occurs in Beowulf c. 496 A.D. where it refers to wandering minstrels who provided entertainment at King Hrothgar's Meadhall, Heorot. King Alfred, in his translation of Boethius, refers to "Omerus, se gode sceop" (Homer, the good poet) c. 888 A.D.

The scop was a singer and teller of tales about the deeds of Teutonic heroes. As the principal preserver of the tribe's history and chronology, the scop was prized and awarded a place of honor in society. The songs and stories were major features of feasts and other great occasions. After the Teutonic tribes were converted to Christianity during the seventh and eighth centuries, however, the scop was denounced by the church. From the eighth century onward, the once honored scop was classed with mimes and like them was branded infamous. The term was used on into the Nineteenth Century, but has become obsolete in present day English. We revive the term as our title because it refers to the creator of literature and the teller of those tales.

Letter from the Editor:

There is an abundance of talent on the Avila campus. We were fortunate to receive many contributions, all of which exhibited creativity and imagination. Sandy Hall, Kris Anderson and I read, discussed and selected from the large number of submissions. We judged the submissions anonymously, and, as you can tell, we chose mostly serious, intriguing, dramatic essays and poetry. The more we read, the more we realized the dark side of our creative brain as well as the eternal bright side. We hope you enjoy this journey of reading as much as we did. We know we will read some Avila writer's name in the future—we are just glad we could be here in the beginning.



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For Nancy Cervetti—I am grateful for your guidance and all the effort you put into this publication. You are a true mentor, friend, & teacher.

—Amy Cameron

A sincere acknowledgment for our generous benefactors:

Mary E. Scott

Nancy Cervetti

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Kris Anderson

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Contest Winners

Best of Poetry:

On Immortality

By Patricia Martin

City on a Hill

By Sharon K. Anderson

Best of Short Essay:

Desolate Soul

By Matt Bolch

Best Essay:

Death Knock

By Sheri G. Porter

Walking through the forest, I lose my self among the skeletons of trees. The bitter cold envelops me as my fingers slowly go numb. The stillness is only broken by the cracking of twigs underneath my muddied hiking boots. The tingling of my ears reminds me of my stupidity for not wearing a hat. The panting of my breath is seen in a distinct rhythm of vapor. The quietness frightens me. Somehow it is unnatural, standing still there is absolutely no sound. Not a soul in sight, I am alone. The woods have eyes and they are all transfixed on me. My trespassing seems unwanted and the empty stares fill my soul with guilt. A bird flutters off giving a crowing sound of sickness. At any moment the wiry branches of the trees will reach out and grab me, then the earth will swallow me up. A shadowy figure follows me with every step I take. Closer and closer, yet not quite upon me. Chanting pounds in my brain, crescendos to an incredible and powerful level. I begin to run, faster and faster, yet my feet are like lead and soon I can not even lift them. I want to run, but can't. Darkness surrounds me, closes in. I cower to the earth and let out a voiceless scream. Sweat pours out of my skin and a cold chill overcomes me. I awaken abruptly, panting and gasping for breath.

Gracefully
a
dainty
winged
ballerina
alights
upon
a velvety violet morning glory

PAUSES—

then
quietly
dances
away.



Melyssa Gautreaux *Hands*

Winner, Best of Poetry

Could've been a big sign on
our bütts, "Rapture or Bust."
Decidedly rapture at four years
old, moving to the center of
salvation, to the beginning.
Going to wrap ourselves
around that first fruit tree and
sing all the way there.

How long to that promised land?
How old when the wagon bumps
you off into the ruts filled not
with milk and honey but rust and
beetle backs.

Have not found my garden.
Going to follow the river, the
prairie, walk in these ruts until
I find that tree that is apart from me.

Lost some cattle.

Was just an oasis in a water
rich land, a half-way house for
an endless journey, a long recess
for a curious and faithless child.

Watermelon juice was just as
good when someone else crushed
it, butter just as shiny, but you have
to learn your own soul.

Chewed wheat into gum,
some Eagers into fitful sleepers,
and the steadfast into wretched,
restless, hand-wringers.

You lost the whole damn herd.

City on a Hill Sharon K. Anderson



Door Opens

Cindy A. Wulff

Juggling pieces of prose
into a poem;
forced into nonsense,
sometimes making new
kind of sense.
Strangeness
liberates a writer.
Freedom is precious, so I
brainstorm, write-storm;
coming up with stunning
ways of seeing,
or saying Something, and
Whish, the door opens.

Pacing back and forth across the small sunlit kitchen, she said several times, "Call, please call." The cold concrete was seeping through the dirty brown kitchen carpeting, through her bare feet and causing a shiver to run up her spine.

Looking at the beige trimline phone, she wished for it to ring, but nothing happened. Outside a car door slammed, next door a cabinet banged closed. The suspense was beginning to get to her. The clock said it was 11:30 a.m., and she had promised herself that she would not call until 12:00 noon. She knew that the decision should have been made by now. It had been two days since the committee had met and discussed her petition and still no word.

She went into the dimly lit living room and dropped her five-foot six inch frame down in front of the TV. There was nothing on it worth watching. The chair seemed uncomfortable today even though it was a well cushioned velour rocker. She shifted around in the chair trying to get more comfortable and felt the softness of the chair's fabric brush against her bare lower arm. She glanced at the TV, but did not really pay any attention to what was happening. Her mind wandered back to the telephone, and she reflected about what she had written in her petition. Would her idea be accepted? She felt that she had one instructor behind her idea. Also, a classmate had liked her idea of retaking Pharmacology on a self-directed basis with an instructor monitoring the independent study. While she retook Pharmacology, she would also continue with the currently scheduled nursing classes. After all, she had not missed passing Pharmacology by very much. The current grading scale had a minimum C at 75%. Her test average had been 73.2%. Her stomach hurt at the thought of not being able to go on with her classmates, of being held back a year. It was turning now and the butterflies would not settle down. She looked at the clock again; it was now 11:45. Why didn't that phone ring? Her mind raced over that thought for about the one-thousandth time that morning.

She decided to pass the time by throwing in a load of laundry. A pile of dark clothes was already sorted, so she went through the pockets one by one. In her pair of blue jeans she pulled out change from one pocket and an old ripped up kleenex from another pocket. From her son's jeans she pulled out a small smooth round rock and enough dirt to fill a teaspoon. In another pocket she poked her finger on the sharp point of a small twig. The rest of the laundry was pretty routine, consisting of the food stains that made clothes stiff and rough and the occasional kleenex. She then added the water, and the sound alternated between the lower hiss of both the hot and cold water together to the higher pitched whine of just the hot water. When the soap was added, the strong harsh scent made her sneeze. She looked at her watch as the splashing sounds of the agitation began. It was now 11:55. She picked up the phone and pushed down on the cool slick buttons and listened to the various tones each button made as she dialed.

Next came the usual recording telling about the school's office hours and how to use

the phone system. Today that monotone male voice irritated her, and she smashed her finger down on the O button for the operator. The phone rang a couple of times, and she told the operator what she wanted, and was connected to the secretary of the Nursing Department. The secretary had an interesting accent. She again tried to place it, could it be Jamaican? She asked to speak with the head of the department and was told that meetings were being held in another building and that she would not be back before 3:30. Frustration welled up inside her, but she kept her voice even and calm as she explained what she wanted and asked to have her call returned. She replaced the phone back onto its cradle a little harder than she had planned, and it banged as it connected.

After shutting off the TV and the light in the living room, she ascended the steps and listened as they squeaked and groaned under her weight. Entering her room, she stretched out on her unmade bed, kicked a blanket down to the bottom and settled in to read a book.

The next thing she was aware of was the heaviness and warmth of the blankets on her. She didn't remember covering up. She also did not remember laying her book down on the page she was reading, but there it was lying off to one side of her queen sized bed. The sun had moved to the back of her townhouse and was now brightening up her room. The clock showed that it was 3:15 in bright red numbers. Stretching out and feeling the rough plastered walls scrape against her fisted up knuckles, she kicked the coarse pink sheet and flowered comforter off.

Her stomach growled and she realized that she hadn't eaten anything today. Walking downstairs and into the kitchen, she opened her pantry and pulled out a big jar of peanut butter and a plastic bear filled with honey. She took out a paper plate from its package and two pieces of medium brown honey wheat bread from their brown plastic wrapper. Some of the fine grains from the bread fell onto the plate as they were laid open to receive their toppings. Opening up the peanut butter, the wonderful aroma of fresh peanuts reached her nose and made her mouth water. The peanut butter was a creamy texture and spread thickly and evenly over the bread, leaving little ridges at the end of each knife pass. The honey bottle stuck to her hand as she squeezed the thick golden liquid out onto the bread. She made a squiggly pattern on the bread before she spread it with a knife. She flipped the side with the peanut butter over the piece with the honey. This combination was one of her favorite sandwiches. As she took her first bite, the sticky sandwich stuck to her teeth and the roof of her mouth. She savored the sweet peanuty taste on her tongue and the coarse feel of the bread as it softened and became gooey. The sandwich stuck in her throat as she swallowed. She followed this down with a cold drink of milk.

She was just finishing when the phone rang. After the amenities were done, the voice on the other end of the phone said, "I have some news that you probably won't want to hear. The committee discussed your petition and decided that it would be setting you up to fail if we let you continue this semester and take Pharmacology also. We feel that it would be too great a course load for you. Since you can only be readmitted one time, we didn't feel that continuing at this time would be fair. You can still reapply to get back in next

fall. You will need to retake Pharmacology if you are readmitted; also, it would be in your best interest to monitor both of the other classes." After a couple of minutes of conversation, she hung up the phone.

The deflated feeling that followed made tears well up and start to roll slowly down her full cheeks. She got a kleenex and wiped away the wetness, but not before some of the tears had reached her chapped pale pink lips and left a salty taste inside her mouth. Her stomach again tightened into knots. She knew that she must get herself back under control since it was 3:45, and she must leave shortly to go and get her children from school. She took several deep breaths and felt the air moving deeply into her lungs and out again as she raised and lowered her chest and shoulders. She crossed her arms across her chest and then out to the side a couple of times to release some of the tension in her back and shoulders. Drinking a very large glass of water, she started to think of other things, knowing that she could come back to this situation later, after the children were asleep. She needed to try and come up with solutions and a better frame of mind to help alleviate her current disappointment. Putting on her coat, she stepped out into the frigid fresh smelling air, wondering if it were really going to snow as the sky was a clear pale blue in the afternoon sun.

Angie Spies Park Vows



On Immortality

Patricia Martin

If there's a sect somewhere
that bends its knee
to nature's evenhandedness,
I should belong.

How order fascinates!
Observe how death,
that patient fetal twin,
awaits us all.

How comforting
that neither prince nor potentate
escapes the sure and fair
unfolding of the perfect scheme.

But let the dark edge
of the cycle
pass me by
for one more spring.

Black Bird Ritual

Judith Towse Roberts

*I'm surprised by harmony in the voices of crows
who meet to roost, bird within bird,
at that moment of morning
which changes wine to blood.
Somehow, the Liturgy of the dark,
drew chains of black wings to
the trees above Brush Creek.
I stopped on my way to work
below their branches raised
like chalices, aloft with so much noise
I watched a spiral of loose birds
tremble from their cup, spill on the parking lot,
drink from pools of oil beneath cars.
Strengthened for flight back to trees,
hollow crows fill one upon the other
and pour, suddenly,
in a Black Resurrection above me.
I know tonight they'll return
to this dark communion,
carrying winter on their backs,
chained to the trees above Brush Creek.*

*The planet is messy,
"Adam, pick up your grape leaf!"
"I am too tired, Lord."
The world needs a housekeeper.*

*The garden is bountiful.
"Adam, feast yourself!"
"I don't know how, Lord."
The kitchen needs a cook.*

*The forest is empty.
"Adam, you need children!"
"Yes, perhaps I can spare ten minutes, Lord."
The home needs a mother.*

CREATION OF WOMAN

*The woodland is dangerous.
"Beware the thorn, my son!"
"Help me, Lord, I bleed."
The patient needs a nurse.*

*The consciousness is void.
"Adam, think man, think!"
"What do you mean, Lord?"
The man needs a woman.*



Shea Lauffer *Still Life*

2

Cindy A. Wulff

If two
is company,
than why
do I
feel crowded?

RAIN

Raindrops
 Pelting my brain
 Refreshing a tired body
 Cleansing a stained soul
 Redemption of a fierce struggle
 Freedom from one's inner-self
 Children splashing in puddles
 Soldiers trudging through mud
 Storms violently invade the land
 Raping the trees of their limbs
 Replenishing a dry earth, cracked and broken
 Illuminating the sky with a barrage of flashes
 Sending a child scurrying under a bed
 Droplets race down a cold window pane
 A woman hides her tears
 Earthworms are forced
 out of their homes
 Rivers swell and rage
 A boy falls asleep on a couch
 Listening to the rhythms drumming on the rooftop
 A farmer falls to his knees and thanks God for the
 Rain

Donald Alfieri *Figure of Life*



Sign of Hope

Kristina Pruitt

Weather-beaten, worn, warped

High on a hill

It stands:

Solitary.

Unlike the murdered souls of another time,

Dead root buried in

Fresh green earth,

Once carried on the shoulders of a carpenter.

Horrible Hair *Marilyn Lee*

You test my limits!
If I want sleek, clingy and close,
For a special intimate evening,
You are mayhem, chaos and confusion,
For your own unknown reasons.

You try my patience!
I condition you for your own good,
To teach you control and self-restraint,
But you break free of chemical bonds
To play in the wind
All kite strings and tails.

You push me too far!
My face wishes to be free
But you wrap my mouth, smother my nose and
Blind my eyes with fingery tendrils.
Brushed away like a pestering mosquito
You revolt with a charge of static
And fly back more committed and bothersome.

You stretch my imagination!
How will I master
These scarecrow straw locks
Medusa's crowning glory?

s c o p

Untitled

Sheri G. Porter

A few years ago I attended a farm auction, and one of my many purchases that autumn afternoon was two thick pieces of bedding, old-fashioned coverlets. The frantic pace of an auction lends itself to hasty decisions, and upon closer examination, I found my coverlets to be dreary and musty. I cursed myself for the four dollars wasted.

When I got home, I headed straight to the laundry room with my woeful load, secretly hoping the coverlets would fall apart so I could throw them away. The first coverlet disintegrated as I removed it from the washer.

I reached for the second soggy heap and lugged it outside to dry. As I hoisted it to the deck railing, the fabric ripped, revealing its secret. Underneath that plain brown wrapper lay a handstitched quilt.

There was no pattern or color scheme. The shapes looked like broken pieces of stained glass scattered on the ground. This crazy quilt was made of sturdy farm fabric, in muted shades gray, green, blue and brown. It was seasoned with a sprinkling of black and cradled a solitary wedge of purple. There were checkered cottons and an occasional piece of flannel stitched in, clothing cut up and reused long before recycling was trendy.

Strewn atop the patches of fabric were pictures woven with thick thread. Some were clearly practice stitches, the work of clumsy young fingers learning a craft. But others were sketches that mirrored a past rural life; images of farm animals, birds, flowers, and a small cottage. Ira, Earnie, Clara and Jennie left their names imbedded in the fabric as well, along with the date, April 5, 1906.

The lesson I learned that day echoed one my mother used to preach: sometimes beauty is buried deep beneath the surface. You have to search for it.



Kerrie Fischer Cheol

Silence Kristina Pruitt

That night, the breeze blew like soft whispers among the trees. I walked in the dying sun and it created a golden halo about me. As it faded, the stars danced around their father, glistening in the water below. The sky paled in a painting as the constant sound of a drumbeat encumbered the bay as tides rolled in, broke and melted into the sand. The world was swept away in the sunset and became absolute in the night air—silence. Nothing but nature's laughter was heard. I caught a memory as it flew quietly among the sea gulls. Wild: like I reached out and grasped in my hand—peace. Then it faded away, like a comet flying through the night. I didn't bother to search for that memory, because that feeling of awe remained. And as I continued on, I created another.

Thinking in wisps of smoke
that transcends other fires,
she walks

On balls of feet or waves of
truth she rolls like quiet
thunder, steady nighttime
drums

Fall deaf and dumb around
her, hungry and humble,
finding no haven in the waves
wake

To find themselves rescued
once again to the heavens
height, resting in feathered
freedom, untethered by the
clarity in the eagles eye and
the suns breath.

Dear Winter Birds:

Sheri G. Porter

As arctic cold shrouds our city
I worry
about you.

Feathers so fragile
seem impossible for warmth,
like wrapping myself
in slender palm branches.
Brrr! barefoot in the big freeze
don't your feet get cold?

You watch
from bare branches
whipping
in the vicious wind.

The crowd around the feeder
grows into a spectacle
of brilliant color;
word spreads quickly
in harsh times.

Cats lay dozing,
secure behind the window
too content for
deadly stalking games.
I'm glad

you have no calendar to plot
the days till spring.
You might lose hope.

i didn't come here, thinking
 this is how it would be.
 once i got here, though,
 i gave up control willingly,
 thinking it might be an okay thing.
 but then i was strapped in tight
 and this car i was in moved up and up
 at a rather odd angle.
 things began to get smaller
 while i was busy flying high.

then the drop.
 i knew it was coming, i saw it,
 but was not prepared at all
 for that awful feeling in my belly
 that perhaps my soul had somehow
 fallen out in the fall.
 it would now be floating aimlessly
 while i lurched around, lost and empty.
 i missed my soul and wanted badly
 to get off the horrible machine.

STOP

oh my...breathe...that was...different.
 and my wobbly legs tried to
 get me out, onto the ground.
 clank. clank. clank.

i sank back into my seat as the
 world was at a funny angle again
 and i giggled at how high in the sky.

i didn't come here, thinking
 this is how it would be.
 the rise— joy, laughter, freedom—
 collided with my screams, terror, pain.
 wind rushing past while everything
 slowly melts into one
 and my brain turns to mush as i
 am thrown about.

the voice on the loudspeaker
 said it is time to go now
 and as i left i told the man
 i didn't come here, thinking
 this is how it would be.
 having lost my soul, nowhere to go,
 i went to the voyage of darkness,
 which looked like an interesting ride.
 as i gave the man my ticket
 i saw my soul waiting for me
 back there, back in the shadows.
 together we stepped into the boat
 rocking gently on the calm, blue water.
 i was filled with an enormous sense of peace
 as i whispered to myself
 i do not know life
 i do not know death
 but i do know that
 i did not come here thinking
 this is how it would be.



Whitney Huenfeld *Untitled*

RED

Her face is tired looking with new lines appearing every now and then around her mouth and eyes. Her hair is thinning and above her ears there is a hint of grey. While she continues to be very active through sports and travel, she sometimes complains of the aching that stings her knees or the reoccurrence of a muscular arthritis she once experienced in her hands. But this doesn't diminish her smile which is like a security blanket telling me everything is going to be all right. She is the one person who has been there for me to kiss away the pain from my many battle scars which appeared after one of those never-ending summer days. She is my best friend. She tells me her opinion about my taste in clothing which is sometimes welcomed and other times refused. I wish she could live forever. She didn't complain much when I brought home a six-week-old Dalmatian puppy to live with us in spite of the fact that we already had a family dog. She has never stopped being a tender teacher talking things out or keeping things in confidence. She has been the strong, silent, sensitive type that has kept our ship running smoothly. I can still smell the sweet, soft scent of her perfume with its perfect purple bottle. Its scent is soft like a summer breeze that cools your skin. What a wonderful woman. Like the color red she is both strong and elegant.

Dark black coffee dripped slowly into the pot, and the rich aroma filled the kitchen. Unconsciously curling her slender fingers around the empty mug in anticipation, Anna scanned the morning newspaper. The forecast called for another July scorcher. A gray cotton tank top hung loosely over her faded cut-off jeans, and rubbing one bare foot casually against the other, she considered turning on the air conditioning. "No, I'll wait," she muttered to herself, knowing it would still be deliciously cool in the shade on the back deck.

Over the drone of the morning news, Anna slowly became aware of an urgent thumping. Puzzled, she cocked her head left, then right. A voice, raw and desperate, cut through the morning's calm, and she stepped through the kitchen doorway and into the adjoining family room. A familiar face, framed in a mass of kinky red, peered through the glass of the back door. Mrs. McGraw's cheeks flushed with exertion, as she beat relentlessly on the glass with a raised left fist. Her wide blue eyes signaled trouble.

With her right hand curled around a thick leather collar, Mrs. McGraw tried to control the struggling beast. As the excited animal lunged again and again, her arm flailed helplessly up and down, as if she were a wooden puppet bound by string. The dog was of hunting stock, his shaggy white fur speckled with liver brown spots that shone in the morning sun.

Anna wrenched the door open, and leaned out into the morning air. As her blond head broke into the sunlight, she saw the cat sitting beside a young locust tree. Its rich gray fur made a dark blemish on the vivid green of the summer lawn. The animal moved, raising slightly on its haunches to stretch two front paws upward, resting them on the tree trunk.

A flash of red caught Anna's eye, and squinting, she saw a wicked slash streaking down the entire length of the cat's belly. Mangled flesh and intestines spilled onto the dewy grass.

"I'm afraid my Duke got one of your cats," Mrs. McGraw whispered hoarsely, as she followed Anna down the wooden steps of the deck. "I was walking him and he got away from me. Your cat tried to make it up the tree, but she fell back down and he got her. I couldn't make him let go."

Anna remembered trimming those needle sharp claws just last night.

The neighbor stood weeping, as the beast threatened to yank her arm from the shoulder socket. The dog smiled, the way dogs do when sure they have pleased their masters. He panted heavily, and flecks of red blood stained his muzzle; his mud brown eyes burned bright and eager.

Suddenly, Anna exploded. "Get out of here," she screamed. "Get that stupid dog out of here, right now." Her voice careened higher and higher. "Get him out, get him OUT!"

She stopped and slumped to the ground.

"My baby, oh, my poor baby," she moaned as she stroked the pitiful gray mass. Mrs. McGraw, sensing a chance to escape the horrid scene, tightened her grip on the collar and dragged the dog across the lawn and to the street.

Numb, Anna tried to think; she felt a dense fog close in around the bright morning. Clearly, the savage attack had left the cat mortally wounded, and she wondered why a thick crimson torrent wasn't spilling from the ragged tear. Raising her moist face, she saw her child standing barefoot on the deck, pajamas hanging limp and wrinkled on her ten-year-old body. The child's golden hair was tangled from sleep, and although her eyes were fresh from a pleasant night's dream, the shock of the sight before her reflected from their deep gray

pools.

"You woke me up with your yelling," said the child softly, staring intently at the twisted mass of gray intestines mingling with the belly fur of her beloved pet. Anna glanced above her daughter's head to the open bedroom window, where a white curtain laced in eyelet trim fluttered peacefully in the morning breeze.

"Run and grab some clean towels from my linen closet," said Anna, her voice quivering. "Hurry."

The child disappeared inside the house, returning in minutes with two worn yellow bath towels. She watched her mother clumsily wrap them around the cat and lift it awkwardly into her arms.

Together, the pair angled carefully up the steps and through the back door, into the kitchen, where the coffee pot had finished its happy humming and the brown mug sat, still empty. Thankful that the towel covered the ugly wound, Anna focused her eyes on the perfect triangular ears, standing like soldiers at attention. She tried to ignore the warm fluid soaking through her shirt.

Anna handed the bundle to her child, who clasped it tenderly to her flat chest. Papers flew from the desk as Anna frantically searched for a phone number. Shaking uncontrollably, she twice failed in her attempt to punch in the right numbers. At last she connected with a faceless voice, spilling out details of the cat's grisly condition. "We're on our way," she said into the receiver, before dropping the phone on the desk with a thud.

"This can't be happening," she repeated over and over again, her voice cracking like a cheap wind-up toy.

"You're going to have to hold her, sweetie, so I can drive," Anna said to her daughter. Nodding, the child followed her mother to the car, cradling her precious cargo as fear shadowed her young eyes.

The car launched itself along Cliff Drive Highway, and Anna fought to gain control of her trembling body. Surely she was going crazy. Tears washed her pale face and her hands clenched the steering wheel so tightly her fingers ached. The child buried her nose in the pile of fur on her lap and a muffled voice asked, "Mommy, can I keep her collar?" The child slid the collar off and held it before her; clumps of soft fur clung to the blue striped fabric.

Anna prayed quietly under her breath.

"Please let her live—please God, let her live."

The cat began an open-mouthed pant, its pink tongue hanging out unnaturally between sharp white teeth. Anna remembered the sandpaper roughness of the tongue, as ragged breathing filled the silence. She inhaled deeply, and shrank back from a foul stench, suddenly realizing that the odor came from the wetness on her shirt. She longed to rip the shirt from her body and fling it out the open window, and she wondered if the smell of death would linger on her skin.

Driving recklessly fast, Anna's gaze fell upon the feline's half-closed eyes, their stunning gold-flecked green fading as the seconds ticked by. Life was seeping out through the eyes again, just as it had two weeks ago when her mother gave in to the cancer. She remembered how the eyes became glassy and dull as death neared, and now, when she looked at the cat in her daughter's arms, the eyes were all she could see. Her mother's eyes were green, too, she remembered, a sob exploding from her throat.

Anna hadn't expected death to knock at her door again so soon, and she wasn't at all sure that she could bear it. Pressing the gas pedal heavily to the floor, she struggled to fight down the savage panic that swelled inside her heart.

